



PUBLIC SPEAKING AND QUESTIONS AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Published by the Committee Section

1. Runnymede Borough Council allows members of the public to speak or ask a question at meetings of the Full Council. This leaflet tells you how you can exercise this right and what the conditions are.
2. The right is for the benefit of people connected with the Borough of Runnymede. You must therefore either
 - live;
 - work;
 - go to school or another educational establishment; or otherwise
 - own or lease landin the Borough of Runnymede.
3. You will have a maximum of 3 minutes to speak on a topic or to make any introductory remarks and to ask one question. The topic must relate to the Council's powers or duties, or affect the Borough or its inhabitants. However, there are certain restrictions:
 - a) you cannot speak or ask about a specific planning application or planning decision;
 - b) you cannot speak or ask about a specific application for a licence or permit;
 - c) you cannot speak or ask about anyone's personal affairs;
 - d) you cannot speak or ask about the limited range of matters where confidentiality in Council proceedings is protected by law (one of the Council's Legal or Committee staff can explain the rules if you are afraid that something you want to say falls into this category).
4. There are five ordinary Council meetings in a year. The right to speak or ask a question only applies to the five ordinary Council meetings. The right does not apply to the Annual Council meeting, the Special Meeting of the Council held to approve the Council Tax or an Extraordinary Meeting of Council. If you want to speak or ask a question at one of the ordinary Council meetings you must make a written request and send it to the Council's Chief Executive Officer. It must arrive by noon on the fifth working day before the Council meeting in question. Most Council meetings are on a Thursday, and so for such a meeting your request would need to arrive by noon on the Thursday beforehand. This allows the Council's staff to check that it meets the requirements, notify the Mayor, and, if it is a question, put the appropriate Councillor on notice that he or she will be called to respond.
5. Your written request must satisfy certain requirements:

You must also avoid repeat questions. If your question, or one meaning the same thing, has been asked by a member of the public at a Council meeting within the previous six months you cannot ask it again.

- a) it must state whether you want to make a speech or ask a question;
 - b) if a speech, it must say what you want to speak about (you do not have to set out the speech);
 - c) if a question, it must set out the wording of your question;
 - d) it must give an address or an e-mail address, or fax number at which you can be contacted before and after the meeting. This is important because the Council's staff will use it to tell you whether your request is in order or to send you any material which may have to be given after the meeting.
 - e) what your "qualification" is (see paragraph 2 above) i.e. whether you live, work, attend an educational establishment, or own or lease land in the Borough.
6. Once you have lodged your request, Council staff will contact you before the meeting and tell you if all is in order for you to be heard at the meeting. They will also answer any questions you have about the procedure.
 7. Council meetings are normally held in the Council Chamber at the Runnymede Civic Centre, Addlestone at 7.30 in the evening (you can confirm this with the Council's Committee Section). When you arrive, identify yourself to a member of staff and then take a seat in the public gallery. When it comes to the time for public speaking and questions, the Mayor will call anybody who has made a proper request, in the order that their requests were received by the Chief Executive. There is a maximum of half an hour to hear everybody which should normally be more than enough, but see note 12 below.
 8. When it is your turn, please stand. You will have a maximum of 3 minutes to speak on the topic you mentioned in your request, or to ask the question you set out. If you are asking a question you can make some introductory or explanatory remarks but you will still only have a maximum of 3 minutes.
 9. If you are making a speech, you will sit down at the end and the Mayor will pass on to the next speaker. If you have asked a question, the Mayor may answer it or will call an appropriate senior Councillor to answer it (the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader, or the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a Committee). If the Councillor chooses to answer (there is no obligation), he or she can do so either orally there and then, or by promising a written reply to reach you as soon as possible after the meeting.
 10. If you ask a question and do not use your full 3 minutes in asking it, you may ask only one supplementary question once the Councillor has responded. You cannot make any introductory or supporting remarks for the supplementary question, and it must relate to the subject of the first question. You may, for example, try to clarify a point made in the answer. The Mayor will call the same Councillor to respond. You only have the right to ask one supplementary question.
 11. Once you have finished speaking on the specified topic or, as the case may be, after the Councillor has responded to your original question and any supplementary one you ask, the Mayor will move on to the next speaker or next business.
 12. When the half hour allowed for public speaking and questions is up, the Mayor will allow any immediate speech, or question and answer, to finish and will then move to the Council's next business. If you are still waiting to ask a question at this point, the Council will send you a written answer as soon as possible after the meeting. If you are waiting to speak, unfortunately there will be no way of giving you the opportunity before the next Council meeting. The Council staff will automatically move your request forward to the next Council agenda unless you notify them that you do not want to speak at that meeting.
 13. Your written request should be sent to:

Chief Executive Officer
Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone

KT15 2AH

Surrey A Calendar of Council and Committee meetings and copies of Agendas and Minutes can be viewed on the 'Committees' webpage at www.runnymede.gov.uk.